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THE MONTANA STATE PARK SYSTEM

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The Montana State Park system was created in the late 30's. The initial purpose for creating the system at that time was to accept a gift of land from the Federal Government...said gift of land being a 160 acre tract which included the Lewis and Clark Caverns. From that beginning, the State Park System has grown slowly over the years. Little was accomplished during the war years and it wasn't until 1945 and 1946 that interest was again shown in developing the state park system. Most of the activity during the post war years was concentrated at Lewis and Clark Caverns. Other areas were added to the system until by 1953 there were some seven or eight units that comprised the system.

From the time the park system was started until the year 1953, the parks were under the management of the Montana State Parks Commission. The Commission was an entity unto itself and the five members of the Commission were appointed by the Governor. The 1953 session of the Legislature changed all this by doing away with the State Parks Commission and transferring all duties and functions of the park system to the State Highway Commission. Since July 1, 1953 we have operated as the State Parks Division of the State Highway Commission.

When the park system was first created in the late 30's the law stated the purpose for which the park system was created. We repeat that purpose here because it is of interest and because it sets up the guide lines under which we operate.

"PURPOSE: That for the purpose of conserving the scenic, historic, archaeologic, scientific and recreational resources of the state, and of providing for their use and enjoyment, thereby contributing to the cultural, recreational and economic life of the people and their health, the State Highway Commission is hereby vested with the duties and powers hereinafter set forth." This purpose covers a vast field of operations and sets up a

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considerable task for us to accomplish. It should also be noted that the "Purpose" gives us three tasks to perform:

1. We are to conserve the scenic, historic, archaeologic, scientific and recreational resources of the state.
2. We are to provide for the use and enjoyment of these resources.
3. Contribute to the cultural, recreational and economic life of the people and their health.

These are worthwhile objectives and deserve the very best effort that we can give toward achieving them.

Now, let us take a look at the state park system as it now exists and see how we are coming toward accomplishing our mission.

The state park system consists of twenty-five (25) units at the present time. These units range in size from 1 acre to 2,770 acres. This would bring the average size for the 25 units to somewhere in the neighborhood of 400 acres.

The acquisition of these units in the park system is rather interesting. With the exception of the 120 acres of land the Park Division owns at Bridger Bowl, all other units of the park system have been given to the state or are under lease from the federal government at no cost to the state. The result is that we do not have what could be termed a "planned" state park system. On the other hand, we have been quite fortunate in these acquisitions in that they do, for the most part, follow along the lines of our objectives. In addition, we do have fair geographic distribution. From this we could reasonably conclude that we do have a good state park nucleus in Montana and that, with sound planning and acquisition, we are in a position to develop a first class state park system.

With further reference to our existing park system it may be of interest to know what purposes these parks are now serving. We mentioned that we have 25 units in the system at the present time. Six of these units are what we call state monuments because the main attraction is that they feature an historic event in Montana's history. Bannack State Monument... Montana's first territorial capital; Missouri River Headwaters State Monument... the Headwaters of the Missouri River as well as a major stop of the Lewis and Clark Expedition;

Chief Joseph Battlefield of the Bear's Paw...Where Chief Joseph fought his last battle. These are just a few examples of the historic sites in the present system. At Canyon Ferry and Tiber Reservoirs we have what we call recreation areas. Both of these reservoirs provide all types of out-of-doors recreation...boating, swimming, fishing, camping and picnicking. There is considerable space available and the areas serve large numbers of people.

At Makoshika State Park, near Glendive, is featured one of the most outstanding badlands areas in the United States. Medicine Rocks State Park near Ekalaka has unique sandstone formations that are unlike anything to be seen anywhere. Lost Creek State Park near Anaconda has interesting formations that would be a paradise for a geology student. Our parks in the Flathead area are mostly scenic in nature and provide access to Flathead Lake, Whitefish Lake and Bitterroot Lake. The feature park of the system is Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park. Here we have the largest limestone caverns in the Pacific Northwest and we find that they are becoming a major attraction in Montana. During the 1961 season we had 46,800 paid admissions at the Caverns.

This gives you an idea of the extent of our existing park system and the many attractions we have to offer at the present time.

The public use of our park system is heavy in those units that are exposed to centers of population or heavy tourist traffic. We can only guess at the annual attendance, but estimate it to be about 365,000 during the 1961 season.

From what we have just pointed out it would appear that we are making progress along the lines of conserving our natural resources, putting them to work and thereby contributing to the cultural, recreational and economic life of the people of Montana.

Now ... what of the future?

We believe that there is a great deal that yet needs to be done with our recreational resources in Montana. First of all we need to patch up our existing park system, acquire additional lands where necessary and bring our facilities up to standard. Much more needs to be done so far as historic sites and objects are concerned. We have six historic sites in the present park system, but this is only a beginning toward what should be done

in preserving the historic heritage of Montana. Then there are many scenic and recreational areas that should be preserved and developed for future use for our own citizens as well as the many thousands and millions of visitors that we have each year.

In giving further consideration to our future State Park needs, we should point out some findings of the study of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission which was recently published. We will mention just a few.

1. The simple activities are the most popular. The Commission discovered that driving and walking for pleasure, swimming and picnicking lead the list of outdoor activities in which all Americans participate, and driving for pleasure is the most popular of all. This is generally true regardless of income, education, age or occupation.

2. Across the Country, considerable land is now available for outdoor recreation, but it does not effectively meet the need. At regional and state levels most of the land available for recreation is where the people are not. The problem is not necessarily one of total acres, but of effective acres. This is true in Montana. Over on Fort Peck Reservoir the Parks Division has two recreation areas with a total of 200 acres in each area. What would those same areas be worth if they were located on Flathead Lake? The weakest spots in our existing park system are recreation areas located near our largest cities such as Great Falls, Billings, Missoula and Butte. We have little or nothing to offer at the present time in these areas.

3. Money is needed. Most State Park agencies are faced with a lack of funds. Outdoor recreation opportunities can be created by acquiring new areas or by more intensive development of existing resources, but either course requires money. Federal, State and local governments are now spending about \$1 Billion annually for outdoor recreation. More will be needed to meet the demand.

4. Water is a focal point of outdoor recreation. Most people seeking outdoor recreation want water -- to sit by, to swim and to fish in, to ski across, to dive under, and to run their boats over. Swimming is now one of the most popular outdoor activities and

is likely to be the most popular of all by the turn of the century. Boating and fishing are among the top 10 activities. Camping, picnicking and hiking, also high on the list, are more attractive near water sites.

5. Outdoor recreation brings about economic benefits. Although the chief reason for providing outdoor recreation is the broad social and individual benefits it produces, it also brings about desirable economic effects. Its provision enhances community values by creating a better place to live and increasing land values. In some underdeveloped areas, it can be a mainstay of the local economy. And it is a basis for big business as the millions and millions of people seeking the outdoors generate an estimated \$20 Billion a year market for goods and services.

These are just a few points we picked up from the report. All apply directly to our situation in Montana and all should be taken into consideration in our planning for the future.

The State Parks Division is now planning for the future. We are currently working on a report that will be submitted to our State Park Advisory Committee next week. If the report is approved there, it will then be submitted to the State Highway Commission and will serve as a basis for our request for funds to the next session of the Montana Legislature.

This report is entitled, "Surgestions and Proposals for Extension of the State Park System" and is divided into four parts.

The first part of the report is devoted to a review of our existing parks, their size and location, how the parks were acquired and whether or not we need to acquire additional acres to make the parks more effective.

The second part of the report presents a listing of new areas that should be added to the park system. In giving consideration to new areas we have tried to keep in mind the historic sites program and the need for better geographic distribution of parks in order that we might better serve the larger communities in Montana.

The third section of the report gives a review of the various agencies, both Federal and State, that we might deal with in acquiring new areas either by lease arrangement or by purchase.

The fourth section of the report will present the financial needs of the State Parks Division. We expect to present a ten year program indicating annual financial needs. This ten year program will, if the necessary funds are made available, bring our existing parks up to standard and provide some 20 to 25 new areas to add to the Montana Park System.

The following is quoted from the report entitled, "Outdoor Recreation for America," as issued by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission.

"In a national effort to improve outdoor recreation opportunities, State governments should play a pivotal role. They are more advantageously situated than either local units or the federal government to deal with many current recreation problems. States have direct experience in shaping programs to meet varying conditions and particular needs of their citizens. And they have the necessary legal authority.

"Today, the outdoor recreation programs and activities of State agencies differ considerably across the country. The problems of recreation in a state where population density exceeds 600 persons per square mile and which has little Federal land are quite different from those in a state with a density of 30 or less, and with substantial national park and national forest land.

"Notwithstanding the diversity of needs, and differences in population, geography, and economics, there are many common problems facing the states. These include organizational arrangements; the need to plan; the problem of expanding the State's recreational resource base by acquisition, development, or other means; the use of State regulatory powers to encourage and to control recreation activities; the need to coordinate recreation programs, both within the State and with neighboring states; the responsibility of dealing with a variety of agencies at the Federal level; the need to assist political subdivisions of the State in solving their recreation problems; and finally, the problem of financing.

"State recreation programs present some striking contrasts. By the end of 1961, some 20 of the Nation's 50 states had made surveys of their future needs for outdoor recreation. New York State voters, in 1960, authorized a bond issue of \$75 million to be used exclusively for the purpose of acquiring more public land--State, county, and local--for parks, beaches, and uplands. During the first year of the ensuing program, more than

50 acres were acquired and over \$10.5 million was obligated. In 1961, the people of New Jersey approved a similar bond issue of \$60 million for "Green Acres"; Wisconsin launched a \$50 million program. Other States, including California, Massachusetts, and Michigan, are developing similar programs.

"But most State park programs are in difficulty. Practically all State park agencies report trouble in securing adequate funds, even for minimum operations. Facilities at some State parks have not been substantially improved since 1940. Personnel is severely limited. Management tools, such as planning and modern accounting systems are often lacking. Underlying all of these difficulties is the absence, in many States, of well-developed civic and political support." End of Quote.

We conclude with these points:

1. The present State Park system comprises a good nucleus from which we can create an outstanding program for Montana.
2. We do need to bring our existing park units up to standard and enlarge where necessary.
3. We have an urgent need to expand our system to include historic sites, scenic sites and recreational areas that will serve the larger communities in Montana as well as serve the tourist traffic.
4. A good state park system will bring economic benefits to the State of Montana.
5. The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission has set forth some excellent guidelines to follow in planning our future operations. It will be to our advantage to follow these suggestions.
6. The State Parks Division has an expansion program planned. If this program is to succeed it will require well-developed civic support.

